





### Lady Mary Minx's Repentance.

Lady Mary Minx was clever, strong minded, and had tempered, and she imagined she held her good-natured, vain old mother, the Countess Dowager of Scilly, in complete subordination. When, therefore, one morning at breakfast the latter informed her that she had on the previous evening become engaged to the able young actor, Mr. St. George Coningsby, her ladyship was both surprised and indignant, and expressed her opinion of the Countess and the Countess's betrothal with great vigour and little equivocation. As long as the remarks were applied only to herself, the Countess bore them in her usual mock and submissive manner; but when Lady Mary proceeded to denounce Mr. Coningsby in all the terms of her varied and powerful vocabulary, she suddenly became exceedingly wroth, and used such strong language, that her daughter found herself, to her amazement, completely eclipsed. She then felt she had gone to far, and that it would be wise to withdraw her observations and express her regret for them. This, she accordingly did, as soon as her mother's eloquence allowed her an opportunity. But the effect of her remarks was not effaced. Henceforth the Countess bore herself towards her daughter with a coldness and a hauteur to which that young lady was not accustomed, and which she did not like.

Lady Mary knew well the hand-some young actor to whom the Countess had become engaged; and, before that event took place, she had admired him very much, and even liked him.

But since his engagement she absolutely detested him. His presence was to her almost intolerable; and when he came home, as he more frequently did to lunch at the dowager's house, he usually found some excuse for being from home. Once he actually dared to meet him; and then she watched him with a very close eye. At first, more bearing was concerned; she had to admit to herself that he was a perfect gentleman. He was easy and polished in his manners, and there was about him a certain state of mind which, though to an unfriendly critic like herself, might savour of the stage, sat well on one of his noble and distinguished appearance. But though in these respects he was all that could be desired, every time Lady Mary saw him she disliked him more and more.

To her keen eyes it was clear he was insincere in his profession as far as the fond dowager was concerned; she had to admit to herself that he was a perfect gentleman. He was easy and polished in his manners, and there was about him a certain state of mind which, though to an unfriendly critic like herself, might savour of the stage, sat well on one of his noble and distinguished appearance. But though in these respects he was all that could be desired, every time Lady Mary saw him she disliked him more and more. To her keen eyes it was clear he was insincere in his profession as far as the fond dowager was concerned; she had to admit to herself that he was a perfect gentleman. He was easy and polished in his manners, and there was about him a certain state of mind which, though to an unfriendly critic like herself, might savour of the stage, sat well on one of his noble and distinguished appearance. But though in these respects he was all that could be desired, every time Lady Mary saw him she disliked him more and more.

Next morning while the Countess, who since their quarrel seldom came down for breakfast, was still in her bedroom, the forged letter and one from Mr. Coningsby arrived. Lady Mary received them with a score of others, but so well had she imitated Mr. Coningsby's writing, that for a moment she was placed in some difficulty, she could scarcely distinguish her own from his. She remembered that the envelope she had used had a peculiar watermark, and holding up the one letter between her and the light, she noted this peculiarity, and then settled any doubt she had. Retaining the other letter, she gave the forged one to Lady Scilly's maid.

Lady Mary then hurriedly locked up the purloined note. She was glad the handwriting were so identical. If she herself found some difficulty in distinguishing them, surely her mother would never suspect forged.

She had got the letter secreted when Lady Scilly's maid returned to her, pale and frightened looking.

"Oh, my lady," she cried, "her ladyship has taken ill. I think she's in hysterics. Will your ladyship please see her?"

"Has she sent for me?" asked Lady Mary, very much scared.

"No, my lady," answered the maid.

"Then ask her if I may come. I don't like to intrude on her without her permission."

The fact was, Lady Mary was not at all anxious to see her mother. Her guilty conscience had already begun to trouble her; and she was afraid that if she went just then into her mother's presence, her crime would in some way or other come out. She waited uneasily until the maid returned, which she did not for a considerable time; and then, by the Countess's direction, she informed Lady Mary that her ladyship was much better, and did not wish to see her just at present—news which eased Lady Mary's mind not a little.

In about an hour, Lady Scilly's maid again came to tell her that her ladyship would not be down that day to lunch; and, in reply to inquiries, said that the invalid was much better and engaged in writing. Lady Mary had little

on one of these that a device occurred to her which might, she considered, if carried out well, put an end to the match she so hated. It was to be worked by means of a false note. She would write a letter purporting to be from Mr. Coningsby to some lady of the ballet, and direct it to the Dowager. In the morning it would arrive by the same post as his letter. She through whose hands all the letters by the early posts passed before reaching the Countess, could retain the real letter and allow the forged one to go to her mother instead. The latter, if the note was ingeniously written, would at once conclude that Mr. Coningsby, whom he was writing to, had also written to a humble lover, by mistake, and enclosed the wrong note in the envelope addressed to her. If she could but do this without discovery, Lady Mary was certain the match would be at an end. She knew how jealous her mother was, how easily her vanity was hurt. The rage and indignation she would feel at his supposed duplicity and contempt for her would soon put an end to her love.

The only objection was that it was an extremely dangerous undertaking. If it was discovered there would be an incurable breach between her mother and herself. At the same time the letter were addressed to "Tottie" or "Lottie" or some such common name, it would be difficult for Mr. Coningsby to show that it was a forgery by anything save his own assertion which Lady Scilly was scarcely likely to believe. At any rate, Lady Mary determined to try it.

Next day she spent several hours writing a letter which might pass for one of Mr. Coningsby's. She had a pretty turn for imitating other people's handwriting, and before she had practised very long, she had written some lines which it would have taken a very clever expert to have said were not his work. She then composed the following note:

DEAR MISTRESS—I am sorry I can't be able to call on you to-morrow night; as I have a very bad cold, and the doctor says I am going to marry. She is getting rather disconsolate of late at my poor old thing. After marriage it will be different. It is late. I am extremely ill. Good-bye, my little fairy.—Yours own

Georgina.

As she knew Mr. Coningsby was to sup with them the following evening, she took the opportunity that night when returning from a ball to post her own production.

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Lady Mary had not the reputation of being a very dutiful or affectionate daughter. All her friends had seen or heard how she again and again annoyed or shocked her poor mother by her wilfulness and her bitter tongue. But now she exuded herself in her care in a way almost beyond belief. Dav and saw her by the sick-bed, watching and tending the sufferer with an indomitable tenderness. Lady Mary was surprised to find her capable of such devotion.

As long as it was uncertain

whether the Countess would live

through the illness or not, Lady Mary thought little of anything else, but when the crisis was over, and the patient was once more conscious, she began to wonder what it was that Mr. Coningsby had not called or written to her mother ever since that fatal morning.

Never! exclaimed the Countess, with strong vehemence. "Never with my consent. He is a mean adventurer—a fortune-hunter of the lowest kind. I always suspected as much, but I wilfully blinded myself. And I never thought he would be so cold-blooded. Mrs. Blunt may have him with all my heart."

Lady Mary was frightened at her mother's passion. She endeavoured to calm her and to turn her thoughts to some other subject. For a time she failed, and the Countess continued talking in broken and passionate phrases; but she was very weak, and soon became exhausted. Lady Mary, who for some time feared that the fever had returned, breathed freely once more when she saw her sink back into a sound and quiet sleep.

That night, Lady Mary went back to her own bedroom, to sleep there for the first time since she left it to nurse her mother. The return to her bed ways induced her to sleep.

In the midst of her meditation she suddenly remembered that the letter she had stuffed in transmission lay in the same box up where she placed it on the day she perpetrated the fraud. She took it to destroy it. When she did, it and almost all of all the suffering it had caused, of the long days and sleepless nights of fruitless repentance and painful watching, of the weeks of sickness when the shadow of death seemed to be over the house, and when she feared every moment would make her a matricide, she had the courage to touch it. She had intended to tear it up without looking at it, but a strange curiosity possessed her, and she turned it over and over, and, with trembling hands, she opened it. When she glanced at the content she turned gaily pale, and a moment afterwards burst into bitter and almost hysterical laughter. The note had stopped was her own—*[London Truth]*.

difficulty in guessing what she was writing about. She felt so uncomfortable that she could no longer remain in the house. So, after lunch, on the plea of having some purchases to make, she spent a considerable time driving about, rather aimlessly.

When she returned—it was about six o'clock—she noticed that the household was in an excited state, and she soon learned the cause. The Countess, after writing and sending one for Mr. Coningsby and the other for Mrs. Blunt, had become so ill that the butler had felt it his duty to send for the family physician, Dr. Killen. That gentleman was now with her, and they were waiting to hear his report.

Lady Mary was horrified by this intelligence. Her mother was, it seemed, seriously ill, it might be dangerously ill, and that illness was caused by her act—an act, as she now had to confess to herself, done, not for her mother's, but for her own interests. What would she do if the Countess died? Would she be the heir to her mother's? The thought was beyond expression. How she bewailed her stupid anger! With regret and fear, too, consciousness, to venture into her mother's presence, she waited in agony at the bed-room door until Dr. Killen came out.

"Oh doctor," she said, when he last appeared, "is she seriously ill?"

"Yes, Lady Mary," replied the doctor, "very seriously. I am afraid she must have suffered a terrible shock of some kind or another. It is as if she were going to have brain fever."

"Brain fever! Is that very dangerous?"

"Very," replied the doctor in a solemn tone. "And I don't think it right to conceal from you, Lady Mary, that I greatly fear her ladyship's case will prove fatal."

While the doctor was speaking Lady Mary stood gazing at him with a fixed look. Suddenly, before he could catch her, she fell fainting at his feet.

He seemed likely enough for a time that Lady Mary would soon be suffering from brain fever as well as the Countess. She was certainly scarcely in her right mind for several days; but fortunately as her mother grew worse she grew better. Before a week was over she had, as it by a superhuman effort of will, thrown off her illness; and she insisted, off and on, Dr. Killen's strongest remonstrances, in nursing her now delirious mother.

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